

Message Text

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71/41

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FM AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8369

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE JERUSALEM 1351

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT PARA 3)

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINS, PBOR, IS, JO

SUBJECT: ISLAMIC OFFICIALS' ACCOUNT OF DESECRATIONS IN

IBRAHIMI MOSQUE IN HEBRON

REF: JERUSALEM 1343 AND PREVIOUS; TEL AVIV 6826

1. SUMMARY: ACCORDING TO OFFICIALS OF HIGHER ISLAMIC COUNCIL (HIC), TWO ATTACKS BY JEWISH SETTLERS FROM KIRYAT ARBA AGAINST PERSONS AND RELIGIOUS OBJECTS IN THE IBRAHIMI MOSQUE OF HEBRON PROCEEDED OCT 3 INCIDENT IN WHICH MULIM CROWD ATTACKED AND DESTROYED JEWISH RELIGIOUS SCROLLS. THE MUSLIM NOTABLES OBTAINED FIRSTHAND ACCOUNTS OF THE JEWISH PROVOCATIONS AND PERSONALLY INSPECTED THE DESTRUCTION IN THE COMPANY OF ISRAELI MILGOV OFFICIALS. ARAB RETALIATION, THEY SAY, RESULT OF INACTION BY MILGOV IN BRINGING KIRYAT ARBA OFFENDERS TO JUSTICE. MUSLIMS DEMAND JEWS BE EXCLUDED FROM MOSQUE. END SUMMARY.

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2. IN ORDER TO OBTAIN OFFICIAL AND DETAILED ACCOUNT OF RECENT EVENTS AT HEBRON, CONSUL GENERAL AND POLOFF REQUESTED MEETING OCT 6 IN JERUSALME WITH HEAD OF HIC, SHEIKH HILMI MUHTASIB. ON ARRIVAL AT HIS OFFICE, ALSO PRESENT WERE HASSAN TAHBUB, DIRECTOR OF THE AWQAF AND ANWAR AL KHATIC, FORMER GOVERNOR OF JERUSALEM.

3. AS RELATED BY THE ISLAMIC NOTABLES, THE FOLLOWING IS SEQUENCE OF RECENT EVENTS IN HEBRON:
FRIDAY, OCTOBER 1 - AT ABOUT THE TIME OF AFTERNOON PRAYERS (1530), THE IMAM OF THE IBRAHIMI MOSQUE AND SMALL GROUP OF MUSLIMS WERE PRAYING IN THE MAIN PRAYER HALL. A GROUP OF ABOUT 10 JEWS FROM KIRYAT ARBA ENTERED AND ATTACKED THEM, STRIKING THE IMAM. THE LOCAL SHEIKH OF THE MOSQUE WHO HAD BEEN IN ANOTHER ROOM, ENTERED AND WAS ALSO ATTACKED. ISRAELI GUARDS INTERVENED TO SEPARATE THE STRUGGLERS. THE IMAM STRUCK A BLOW AND WAS ARRESTED. (HE HAS BEEN IN PRISON SINCE.) THE JEWS WERE ALLOWED TO LEAVE.

4. SATURDAY, OCT 2 - AT 0620 THREE MUSLIMS WERE PRAYING IN THE MOSQUE WHEN A GROUP OF SOME 15 KIRYAT ARBANS ENTERED THE MAIN PRAYER FOAM. THEY APPROACHED THE PULPIT (MINBAR) WHERE KORANS, OTHER HOLY BOOKS AND RELIGIOUS ITEMS ARE STORED. THIS THEY OVERTURNED, SCATTERING THE RELIGIOUS BOOKS AND ITEMS AND THEN STOMPED ON THEM.

5. UPON BEING INFORMED SOON AFTER, SHEIKH MUHTASIB WITH HASSAN TAHBUB WENT TO HEBRON TO VIEW THE SCENE. EXTENSIVE DESTRUCTION WAS EVIDENT. THEY DEMANDED THAT ISRAELI DEFMIN PERES OR WEST BANK MILGOV HAGOEL COME TO THE SITE. AN ASSISTANT OF THE HEBRON REGION MILGOV DID COME AND VIEWED THE DESTRUCTION, BUT - HE SAID - PERES WAS NOT AVAILABLE. LATER, HAGOEL CAME, SAW THE DESTRUCTION AND EXPRESSED REGRET. A REQUEST BY THE ISLAMIC OFFICIALS TO ADMIT PHOTOGRAPHERS WAS DENIED. ON LEAVING, CROWDS WERE WAITING. SHEIKH MUHTASIB EXPLAINED TO THE PEOPLE WHAT THE ISLAMIC OFFICIALS HAD DONE AND PROMISED TO FOLLOW UP THE SITUATION. THE CROWDS INSISTED THE ISLAMIC OFFICIALS MEET WITH THE MUNICIPALITY AND ISSUE A JOINT STATEMENT. (STATEMENT RECEIVED BY CONGEN 5 OCT AS FOLLOWS:

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THE AMERICAN CONSUL GENERA:

THE NOBLE IBRAHIMI SANCTUARY IN HEBRON HAS BEEN DESECRATED AND HOLY BOOKS THEREIN HAVE BEEN TROD UPON AND THEIR PAGES TORN BY SETTLERS OF KIRYAT ARBA. MUSLIMS HAVE BEEN FORBIDDEN ENTRY. WE REQUEST YOUR INTERVENTION TO PROTECT OUR MOSQUES AND HOLY SITES.

SIGNED: PRESIDENT OF HIC, MAYOR OF HEBRON, MUFTI OF JERUSALEM, QADI OF HEBRON, GENERAL DIRECTOR OF AWQAF, REGIONAL DIRECTOR OF AWQAF (HEBRON).

6. SUNDAY, OCT 3 - ISRAELIS ASKED HIC TO MEET WITH AN IMPORTANT PERSONALITY (LATER IDENTIFIED AS PERES). COUNCIL REFUSED TO DO SO OFFICIALLY, BUT MUHTASIB DID MEET PERES UNOFFICIALLY. MUHTASIB TOLD PERES THAT HARAM AL IBRAHIMI WAS A MOSQUE AND SHOULD SO REMAIN THAT RECENT VIOLENCE RESULTED FROM ITS USE BY ISRAELIS. THEREFORE, HE ASKED PERES TO PROHIBIT ISRAELI USE. PERES SAID THE MATTER WOULD BE STUDIED AFTER THE HOLY DAY (YOM KIPPUR). MUHTASIB OBJECT THAT THE MATTER HAD BEEN STUDIED SUFFICIENTLY AND REFUSED ANY FUTURE MEETINGS UNTIL CORRECTIVE ACTION TAKEN.

7. IN OCT 6 CONVERSATION WITH CONGEN, MJSIM OFFICIALS ARGUED THAT RETALIATION BY MUSLIMS OCT 3 WAS PROVOKED BY FRUSTRATION OVER INACTION BY ISRAELIS IN PUNISHING PERPETRATORS OF OCT 1 AND 2 ATTACKS. RABBI LEVINGER'S RECENT WIDELY PUBLICIZED DEFIANCE OF MILGOV ORDERS AND HUMILIATING TREATMENT TO WHICH ISRAELI SOLDIERS SUBJECTED CONVINCED ARABS THAT GOI NOT SERIOUS ABOUT CURBING KIRYAT ARBANS' EXCESSES. MR. KHATIB EXPRESSED THE FEAR THAT ISRAELIS WOULD EXPLOIT THIS OPPORTUNITY TO EFFECT RADICAL CHANGES IN PHYSICAL SET UP OF THE SHRINE.

8. AS THE MAJOR SUPPORTER OF ISRAEL, THE U.S. GOVERNMENT, THE NOTABLES ARGUED, HAD THE POWER AND THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PREVENT PROVOCATIVE ISRAELI ACTIONS IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES.

9. CONSUL GENERAL EXPRESSED REGRET OVER INCIDENTS WHICH HAD RESULTED IN BLOODSHED ON BOTH SIDES AND INFLAMED PASSIONS. HE SAID US.VIEW ON WEST BANK AND JERUSALEM WELL KNOWN AND REFERRED TO GOV. SCRANTON'S SC SPEECH AS WELL AS SECRETARY'S REMARKS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TO ARAB FOREIGN MINISTERS ABOUT NEED FOR COMPREHENSIVE COLUTION.

10. COMMENT: VIOLENCE BY JEWISH AND ARAB RELIGIOUS EXTREMISTS HAVE CREATED EXPLOSIVE ATMOSPHERE WHICH LEADERS ON BOTH SIDES ARE WORKING TO DEFUSE. SITUATION HAS DETERIORATED EVER SINCE KIRYAT ARBA RESIDENTS AND ARABS HAVE WORSHIPPED IN SAME BUILDING DESCRETION OF TORAH HAS PROVOKED STRONG REACTION IN RELIGIOUS CIRCLES IN JERUSALEM AND DESPITE EFFORTS OF THEIR ELDERS, RETALIATION BY JEWS CANNOT BE RULED OUT. GIVEN AUTHORITY STATEMENTS ALONG, WE WONDER WHY MFA CATEGORICALLY DENIED TO EMBASSY TEL AVIV THAT KORANS AND MUSLIM RELIGIOUS ARTICLES HAD BEEN DESCRATED (TEL AVIV 6826).
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